

Sheriff Herman Thomas Lange | Dearborn County



Age: 40 $\frac{1}{4}$ years

Served: 1 year

December 31, 1928 to December 31, 1929

BACKGROUND

Herman was born September 3, 1889 in York Township near Aurora, the third of nine children born to William Christian and Margaretha Louise "Christina" (Lampe) Lange. He grew up working the family farm in Manchester.

Herman married Mary Magdalena (Mayme) Gesell of Klemme's Corner near Brookville on November 29, 1911. They began their married lives, he as a farmer, in Greendale. Their first and only child, Stella Mae, was born in 1914. A few months later, they

bought a 71-acre farm in Wright's Corner.

During the agricultural depression of the 1920s, while the family continued living on and working the farm, the ownership of it passed to Judge Charles Lowe of the 7th District Circuit Court and Herman worked as his riding bailiff. By 1929, the Langes owned the farm again, but Herman remained involved in the criminal justice system and politics.

Herman first ran for Sheriff of Dearborn County in the 1924 Republican Primary. He lost that bid by 28 votes. He entered the Primary again in 1928 in a three-man race, won the nomination, and went on to win a slim victory over Democratic incumbent Sheriff Frank Winter. He was sworn in as the 37th Sheriff of Dearborn County on January 1, 1929. The job payed little more than \$100 a month and he had to supply his own revolver, badge, and transportation.

Sheriff Lange moved his family into the County Jail building. He appointed Mayme as Matron. She cooked meals for the prisoners, clerked for the Sheriff, and took care of his County and financial records.

INCIDENT

On December 30, 1929 at 2 a.m., Dearborn County resident Fred Schwig, called Sheriff Lange to report that a man had been shot in the leg at "Spike's" bootleg camp on the Whitewater River. The victim was Connerville resident Ben Shaw (68). Sheriff Lange and Deputy Lafe Perpington responded to the camp and twenty minutes later found that Shaw had been treated by Dr. Schoenling of Harrison and transported to Cincinnati's Good Samaritan Hospital in an ambulance operated by the Jackman and

Penny Funeral Home of Harrison. They questioned witnesses and two suspects, Gus Seiter and Roscoe Bradburn. They took the suspects to the Dearborn County Jail and ascertained that the gunman was a James Anderson who had gotten away.

Sheriff Lange began his search for Anderson along Highway 52 to Brookville in Franklin County in his Ford Model T Sedan. He met with Sheriff Personett of Franklin County and shared information on Anderson.

He then went south along the Harrison and Brookville Road (State Route 52). About 5 a.m., Sheriff Lange spotted Anderson on the side of the road near Braysville and Longenecker's Station (we believe just north of Interstate 74).

He stopped, got out of his car, and approached Anderson to ascertain his identity, but not yet divulging himself as a law enforcement officer. When a gust of wind blew open his coat, Anderson saw his Sheriff's badge. Anderson, from five feet away, drew his .38 caliber revolver, and opened fire. One bullet passed through two fingers of Herman's left hand and into his abdomen and another passed through his stomach penetrating the intestines and lodging in the groin. Though mortally wounded, Sheriff Lange drew his gun as he fell and fired all six shots at Anderson who was running away across the road. One shot took effect in Anderson's shoulder.

Anderson scurried across railroad tracks, tumbled down a dirt and gravel embankment, and bolted into the nearby corn field. He ran along the river, railroad, a corn field, and highway all the way to Brookville and then to Connersville in search of friend or family to aid him.

Sheriff Lange dragged himself to a nearby farmhouse and called for help. Finally a light came on and Thomas Maines exited the house. The farmer hesitated to help him until he was convinced

the he was the Sheriff. Maines helped him into his house and called for help. Dr. Sheets of Harrison came and, seeing the seriousness of the sheriff's wounds, called the Jackman and Penny Funeral Home to transport Sheriff Lange to Bethesda Hospital in Cincinnati. There, doctors performed emergency surgery. They were cautiously optimistic.

DEATH

With family at his side, Sheriff Lange passed away at 10 p.m. on Tuesday, December 31, 1929 of peritonitis due to the gunshot wound; twelve hours shy of one year as Sheriff. He is the first Dearborn County law enforcement officer reported to have suffered a line of duty death and the only one to have been murdered.

Sheriff Lange was survived by his wife, Mayme Lange (43), and daughter, Stella Mae Lange (14). His body was laid in state in the courtroom at the Dearborn County Courthouse on Friday, January 3, 1930. The Robert McAllister Post of the American Legion furnished an honor guard at the courthouse. Funeral services were held at the Zion Lutheran Church in Manchester (founded by Sheriff Lange's cousin, Christian Busse) on Saturday, January 4, 1930. It was largest ceremony ever held there. The pall bearers were Dearborn County officials; M. W. McManaman, Thomas Dartnell, Bruce McLeaster, I. C. Harper, Charles Chambers, Julius Schwing, Judge William D. Ricketts, Edward Hayes, William Hornberger, Harry Dean, George C. Cole, and George Homan. Sheriff Lange was buried in Greendale Cemetery in Lawrenceburg on January 4, 1930.

INVESTIGATION

Prosecuting Attorney Julius Schwing and former Judge Lowe called Detective Ora Slater, former Dearborn County Sheriff, to take a statement from Sheriff Lange at the hospital. Sheriff Lange weakly mumbled a "dying declaration" to Detective Slater and stenographer, Howard L. Shearer.

Before Sheriff Lange died, the Dearborn County Commissioners met in session. William Hornberger, Leonard Harper, and Harry Dean offered a \$500-reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of Sheriff Lange's shooter. A large posse of men was gathered and reinforced by officers and private citizens from various locations in Indiana and Ohio. They searched the entire region, focusing on everywhere Anderson might have gone and everywhere he had known to have been, but they did not find him.

On January 1, 1930, the County Commissioners met and appointed Mayme Lange to become Sheriff of Dearborn County completing her dead husband's term of office.

On January 2nd, Ben Shaw died of his gunshot wound. Anderson was now wanted for two murders.

The search for Anderson continued with officers and others from all around Indiana and Ohio. There were numerous reports of his location but none that produced the killer, and the investigation expanded to family members who were helping him avoid arrest.

On January 3, 1930, Sheriff Leon Neal Of Ohio County, Lafe Perpington, and Harry Hunter found Walter Anderson, the killer's 23-year-brother, about eight miles north of Brookville at the farm of William Martin southwest of Blooming Grove. After a short investigation, they arrested him and charged him with aiding a fugitive to escape. Then they found Leonard Burch, Anderson's brother-in-law, working at the Auburn automobile plant in Connersville and arrested him. While they admitted

their parts in helping Anderson escape, his brother and brother-in-law would not divulge his location.

On January 6th, Judge William Ricketts called the Dearborn County Circuit Court to convene a grand jury investigation into the murder of Herman Lange. On January 9th the Grand Jurors handed down an indictment for Murder in the First Degree against James Anderson. Judge Ricketts also appointed former Judge Lowe to assist Prosecuting Attorney Julius Schwing.

Investigators found that Anderson had family somewhere in Harlan County, Kentucky and that he might be found there with his father. On January 6, 1930, Leon Neal, Harry Hunter, Glenn Bryant, Otis Roehm, Lewis Wilson, and former sheriff, Cal Crim Detective Ora Slater went to Livingston, Kentucky hoping to interview Anderson's father. They found that Anderson's father had been tipped and was no longer in the area.

Investigators chipped away at Anderson's family and associates until a break came during March 1930. Former Perry County (Kentucky) Sheriff W. M. Cornett provided investigators with sufficient information to detain the current Sheriff Gross. During his interrogation, he advised that Anderson admitted shooting Sheriff Lange and immediately after, on March 11, 1930, they found and arrested Anderson.

He was transported to the Lawrenceburg Jail about 8 p.m. on March 12th. Due to concerns for his safety, officials moved him to the Ripley County Jail in Versailles at about midnight. The next day, Deputy Sheriff Hulbert and Dr. J. M. Jackson of Aurora moved Anderson further up State Route 46 to the Greensburg jail in Decatur County.

While there, Anderson reported becoming intensely religious and that he wanted to get right with God. On Saturday morning,

March 15th, about 6 a.m., Decatur County Sheriff Newt Coy called Deputy Hulbert to advise him that Anderson wanted to make a voluntary, written confession. Though they already had a rock-solid case against Anderson, that afternoon, Deputy Hulbert, Prosecutor Julius C. Schwing, Assistant Prosecutor Judge Charles A. Lowe, Sheriff Coy, of Decatur County and his deputy, Detective Ora Salter, and stenographer Edgar Kurtzman responded and witnessed his statement.

Decatur County officials were so taken by Anderson's religious façade, they accompanied him to church services in Greensburg on Sunday, March 16. The entire congregation of the First Baptist Church was brought to tears by the murderer's account of his crimes. Anderson begged to be baptized. He confessed his sins. Reverend J. P. Mitchell baptized the killer. He said he was willing to die for the slayings. He added that if he received a life sentence, he would devote his entire prison life to the Lord's work.

The Dearborn County Circuit Court convened on March 24, 1930. He was represented by C. W. Napier of Hazard. Napier had been Prosecuting Attorney for the thirty-third Judicial District in Perry County. The number of legal maneuvers made on behalf of James Anderson would soon belie his asserted religious conversion and would cost the County more than any known trial and conviction before; including having the trial moved to Franklin County.

On May 26, 1930 at 9:00 a.m., in the court room of Franklin County Circuit Court Judge Roscoe C. O'Byrne, the officers of the court were Charles A. Lowe, Julius G. Schwing, and Charles R. Baker for the prosecution and C. W. Napier and William L. Chambers for the defense. Sheriff Mayme Lange and daughter Stella attended daily. By June 7th, the jury, having its

instructions, deliberated for three and one-half hours. They returned to the courtroom and pronounce Anderson guilty. The judge immediately sentenced Anderson to death.

After 3½ years and legal meanderings, all ending in Anderson's execution being upheld, the criminal justice system and people of Indiana were betrayed by Democrat Governor Paul V. McNutt on December 7, 1933 when he commuted the sentence to life imprisonment. Then, Democrat Governor Henry Schricker issued an executive order commuting his life sentence to "time served to life" and he was paroled.

Still not happy, Anderson asked for a discharge from his parole restrictions in 1950; and repeatedly thereafter, until he was released from all restrictions on January 11, 1960 by Republican Governor Harold Hanley.

EPILOGUE

With her appointment as Sheriff, Mrs. Lange became the first female to serve as Sheriff in Indiana and the first female to hold any political office in Dearborn County.

During March 1930, she decided to run for the office of Recorder of Dearborn County. As Sheriff her responsibilities included finding her husband's murderer, preparing and attending his trial, and all other responsibilities of Sheriff. Thought she found little time to campaign, Mrs. Lange handily won the 1930 election for a four-year term as Dearborn's County Recorder.

She lost the next election when a full slate of Democrats was elected to County offices. Mrs. Lange went to work at Seagram's Distillery in 1935.

While visiting her daughter in North College Hill on September

3, 1944, she fell ill and died that evening. She was buried next to her husband.

James Anderson married, lived in Burlington, Kentucky, worked for the railroad, and had two sons. We have no evidence that he lived a religious life after his 1930 "conversion."

If you have information, artifacts, or images regarding this officer or incident, please contact the Greater Cincinnati Police Museum at Memorial@Police-Museum.org.

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